

Written Testimony for House Bill No. [5193](#)

To whom it may concern:

My name is Geoff Decker and I am submitting written testimony to express my opposition to House Bill No. 5193. I have recently moved to Cranston from out of state with my wife and two young children who will soon be eligible to enroll in Rhode Island's public schools. If passed, this legislation will significantly limit our school options and send a direct message to Rhode Island families, particularly those in underserved communities, that they shouldn't have a choice about where to send their children to school.

According to a WPRI.com article published on January 21, 2021 ([McKee, Senate leaders at odds over charter schools moratorium](#)), HB 5193 would not only place a moratorium on the approval of future charter schools, which are 100% publicly-funded and privately-run. It would also immediately block six charter schools (three new schools and three expansions) that have already been approved to begin serving new children as early as fall 2021. The disruption alone that this would cause to educators and families who are preparing for these openings is reason enough to oppose this legislation. It would also significantly limit the number of seats available for parents like myself who would be interested in applying to our local charter elementary school (Achievement First Illuminar).

But what also matters to parents like myself, and to all Rhode Islanders with a stake in the state's economic and educational standing, is whether students have access to learning opportunities that will prepare them for the future. To this extent, several of the schools affected by this legislation have proven track records for serving student populations who have historically been failed by our traditional public school systems. Consider:

- Achievement First's schools rank as among the highest-performing in the state. According to a 2018 editorial in [the Providence Journal](#), AF Illuminar, serving primarily Providence students, including 70% who are Hispanic, ranked as the highest-performing school in the state on math and English test scores, outperforming even the top suburban schools.
- Excel Academy, a charter school network based in Boston, has been recognized as a national leader ([Inclusion in Action, Education Next](#)) for its success in serving special student populations, including English language learners and students with special needs.

In addition to my interest as a parent living in Rhode Island, I am also writing with a unique perspective as an education journalist who covered education reform and policies in New York City for 10+ years. I understand, better than most, the complexities of education. I understand that charter schools are not a panacea. The charter sector is not without its challenges and is deserving of scrutiny. But any clear-eyed examination of student achievement outcomes in Rhode Island and nationally (as measured not just by standardized test scores, but also college-readiness and postsecondary success) demonstrates that SOMETHING is working for

the students attending the top-performing charter schools. Most importantly, they are working for students and communities that have been systematically failed by traditional public education for decades.

Rhode Island lawmakers should be asking: What's working? What's scaleable? What's not working? Instead, with this bill, they are telling Rhode Islanders that they're not interested or even curious to learn more about what it takes to better educate our children.

Respectfully
Geoff Decker